

# The Army Isn't Running Gorbachev

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By Stephen M. Meyer

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CAMBRIDGE, Mass.

In his news conference last week, President Bush added to recent speculation that the Soviet military is reasserting its influence over Mikhail Gorbachev. Nevertheless, there is nothing to suggest that the trend of declining military influence in recent years has been reversed.

The "evidence" for such a shift is sketchy at best: "changes" in Soviet positions in arms control negotiations; a tougher line against nationalist movements; stiffening resistance to German unification under a NATO umbrella, and ongoing strategic-weapons modernization.

There are far more obvious explanations for President Gorbachev's policy twists.

There is nothing surprising or ominous about a hardening and retrenchment in Soviet positions on certain provisions of the impending agreement to limit strategic arms. Similar "setbacks" have occurred during the endgame of every U.S.-Soviet arms control negotiation. It is part of the process of coming to terms.

Perhaps more important, Kremlin insiders claim that Mr. Gorbachev has been preoccupied with domestic problems for the past nine months. It was only the impending summit meeting with President Bush that forced the minutiae of Start back onto the Soviet President's agenda.

Nor is there anything mysterious about Soviet reticence about careening toward an agreement on conven-

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tional forces. The European landscape has been turned upside-down since that discussion began.

When the negotiations started, there were two military alliances in Europe. In the last six months, the Warsaw Pact has disintegrated — a strategic nightmare beyond the bounds of Soviet worst-case planning. A unified Germany will exist within a matter of months. The capacity of the Soviet economy and society to absorb troops released by Mr. Gorbachev's unilateral troop cut has proved woefully inadequate. In light of these epoch-making changes, no sane Soviet leader would proceed without a major policy review. That means a significant slowing of negotiations.

The notion that Mr. Gorbachev would allow Lithuania, or any other part of the Soviet Union, to declare itself independent one day and leave the next is naïve. Can anyone seriously think that he had to be coerced into a tough stance against Lithuania or Latvia?

Mr. Gorbachev has more to lose than anyone — and certainly more than the Soviet military — in permitting the uncontrolled dissolution of the country. And since Lithuania's first act of defying Soviet authority was to sanction Lithuanian nationals' desertion from the Red Army, no

## Its influence is still declining.

arm-twisting was needed to make Mr. Gorbachev understand the need to take "corrective action."

Mr. Gorbachev's stand against a unified Germany within NATO makes perfect political and military sense from the Soviet point of view. Is there anyone in the West who would sanction a unified Germany in the Warsaw Pact? To the extent that there has been any notable change in the Soviet position regarding Germany, it has been a softening, a search for compromise. This is not an illustration of military influence.

Finally, no serious student of Soviet military affairs expected a unilateral end to the modernization of the nation's strategic arms. Certainly, Mr. Gorbachev never gave us reason to expect it. Soviet strategic nuclear forces are in the midst of a major transition to mobile ICBM's and a more balanced triad of land-, air- and

sea-based forces. The ongoing modernization is, however, less extensive than anyone would have predicted a few years ago.

The coincidence of Mr. Gorbachev's policy interests with those of any group — the military, academics or pig farmers — is not evidence of influence. Yes, the military does have a strong say in Soviet defense policy. But its influence is limited to persuasion, and is increasingly circumscribed by political changes initiated by Mr. Gorbachev.

Just last month, for example, a new supreme national security body was created — the Presidential Council — replacing the old Defense Council. Now the military has but a single advisory voice in the high councils of Soviet national security policy. Previously, it held several voting seats. This does not portend increasing military influence.

Parades, medals and other symbolic gestures to military prestige — offered as forces and defense resources are being cut — are signs not of rising influence but of tokenism. Some analysts have interpreted Defense Minister Dmitri T. Yazov's recent promotion to marshal as evidence of political power. Rather, it is more likely a gold watch for an impending retirement.

Clearly, we have become too used to an overly-compliant Gorbachev regime, one that seemed prepared to fulfill our every wish — sometimes to the point of disbelief. When at last we are confronted with Soviet policies we do not like, we hunt for dark forces that are gaining sway over the forces of good.

But we are only fooling ourselves. Mikhail Gorbachev is going to pursue policies that he believes to be in the best interests of his country and his place in history — not ours. □

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